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Hear No Controversy

Now that President Eisenhower has returned to the White House, he will find that the debate on defense policy and national effort has been temporarily eclipsed by the Senate filibuster. The underlying issue, however, remains very much unsettled—the issue of American military, economic and psychological preparedness to cope with the total Soviet challenge. Senator Fulbright put the philosophical considerations cogently in an extraordinary speech Friday night during the filibuster:

There never has been a time when we did not have the resources of men, money and access to knowledge that might have given us a wide lead over any aggressor and made attack upon us suicidal. Yet we have apparently believed we could not afford to spend enough to secure our liberties.

What disturbs Mr. Fulbright as much as the failure to call forth more effort and money for a more adequate defense during the next several critical years is the President's tendency to shrug off protests as parochial and to insist that he knows more about defense than anyone else. Mr. Fulbright urges the President to inform the people about what is necessary to insure American superiority in all possible areas and the success of this country's peaceful goals—along with the cost. He adds, and this newspaper heartily agrees: "I believe that the people would respond, that their latent greatness so long submerged would again manifest itself; that they would be found equal to the task."

Because these remarks come from the Democratic chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, there may be some tendency in the Administration to dismiss them as partisan. But much the same point has been made by several prominent Republicans in testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery. Former Secretary of Defense Robert A. Lovett deplored excessive deference to the budget in policy making. He also criticized the unwieldy organization of the National Security Council, upon which, in addition to the five statutory members, not infrequently five or six others also sit by invitation. Mr. Lovett said of this top policy body:

I would have very grave doubts about its ability to operate in a mass atmosphere. I think it would inhibit frank discussion. I think it would be an embarrassment as regards the vigor with which a man might want to defend his position. I think it would limit the quality of the debate which the President ought to hear.

It is this matter of full and frank discussion before the President to which both Mr. Fulbright and Mr. Lovett have addressed themselves. No doubt because of his military background, Mr. Eisenhower relies heavily upon the staff system. He has on many occasions voiced his wish to have controversies settled before they reach him, and he has evidenced displeasure at differences within the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Yet, as Mr. Lovett observed:

... it is a real disservice to the President not to debate matters of some importance before him, because it denies him, in those circumstances, the possibility of seeing an alternative or an obstacle. . . . I think the President in his own protection must insist on being informed and not merely "protected" by his aides.

Curiously enough, in the end the President sometimes does what his critics ask. Despite his refusal to acknowledge any race in the space program, he recently approved a budget addition of more than \$100 million which will make the program considerably more adequate. But altogether too often he gives the impression, to repeat Adlai Stevenson's political characterization of the Republican Party, that he is being dragged kicking and screaming into the Twentieth Century. By that time the damage has been done by the initial attitude either that no urgency exists or that the country cannot afford what is necessary.

At this late stage in the Administration, it is unlikely that basic outlook or habits of insulation will change markedly. The President could evidence his appreciation of the seriousness of the debate and enhance his stature in the process, however, if he would cease to regard criticism as a reflection upon his sincerity and recognize that the advocates of greater effort are motivated by a concern for the country just as fervent as his own.

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